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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the social construction of individualism as one of the strongest marks of traditional teacher identity. It discusses, through an educational literature review, why individualism is one of the strongest marks of traditional teacher identity, how this feature has been historically and socially constructed, why it has been so difficult to change this component of traditional teacher identity, and whether there is any possibility for constructing collaboration and solidarity as new features of teacher identity. After looking at the ethos of the occupation (conservatism, individualism, and presentism), the structure and culture of schools, the teachers' professional preparation and professional career, and the relationships between teachers and other people at the school, the paper examines myths in teacher identity construction. Finally, it suggests the importance of looking at school not only as a teaching and learning institution, but also as a place where people develop collaborative research, asserting that collaborative teacher research (to be developed in schools and teacher education programs) is one possibility for transcending or transforming traditional boundaries of teacher identity. (SM)

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The Social Construction of Teachers' Individualism: How to transcend traditional boundaries of teachers' identity?[1]

ED 471 561

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Júlio Emílio Diniz-Pereira[2]

1. Introduction

Beginning in the 1980s, we have observed a sharp increase in qualitative research in teacher education around the world. Furthermore, there has been a change in focus in that line of research, one that places educators in the center of much of the research investigation. As a result, there has been an increased interest in issues of *subjectivity* and *identity* in teacher education has been observed ever since.

This paper intends to contribute to a better understanding of how individualism – one of the strongest marks of traditional teachers' identity – has been historically and socially constructed. Furthermore, it also discusses possibilities for constructing collaboration and solidarity as new features of teachers' identity.

In this paper, I address the social construction of individualism as one of the strongest marks of traditional teachers' identity. I discuss, through an educational literature review, the following questions: Why is individualism one of the strongest marks of traditional teachers' identity? How has this feature been historically and socially constructed? Why has it been so difficult to change this component of traditional teachers' identity? Is there any possibility for constructing collaboration and solidarity as new features of teachers' identity? If yes, how is it possible?

The "ethos" of the occupation, the structure and culture of schools, the teachers' professional preparation, their professional career, as well as the relationships between teachers and other people at schools are quite important issues that help us understand how individualism has been constructed as one of the strongest features of traditional

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teachers' identity. After discussing each of these issues separately, I present – in the final section of this paper – some ideas of how to transcend traditional boundaries of teachers' identity. The assumption here is: we must look at school not only as a teaching-and-learning institution but also as a place where people develop collaborative research. Structural and cultural changes in schools and teacher education programs can offer possibilities for constructing a new teacher identity.

2. The "Ethos" of the Occupation

Lortie (1975) defines "ethos" as "the pattern of orientations and sentiments which is peculiar to teachers and which distinguishes them from members of other occupations." (p. viii) According to the author, three significant components have been part of the ethos of teaching: *conservatism*, *individualism* and *presentism*.

> Components of the ethos apparently reinforce each other: conservatism, individualism, and presentism work together to produce features of the occupational subculture (p. 229).

Thus, these three components work interdependently. Other features of teaching also participate in this complex process of producing this professional subculture which seems to reproduce itself.

> The current organization of teaching tasks fosters conservatism of outlook. Change is impeded by mutual isolation, vague yet demanding goals, dilemmas of outcome assessment, restricted in-service training, rigidities in assignment, and working conditions which produce a "more-of-the-same" syndrome among classroom teachers. (p. 232).

According to Mitchell (1997), researchers have also argued that some teachers prefer individualism to collective activities not because of "endemic uncertainty" or professional insecurities, but rather "because of classroom and school constraints – such as curriculum mandates, class-size, other demands on time and energy – that make individual activity a necessary and pragmatic coping mechanism."

However, Mitchell notes that cultural norms of individualism in teaching point to only one of the several barriers to increasing collaboration. Structural conditions in schools, teachers' differing pedagogical orientations, as well as the absence of a shared professional identity among teachers create obstructions to teachers' cooperation as well. She stresses in her article the problem of a lack of shared professional identity at schools – "an identity in which teachers hold common beliefs about themselves as teachers and common expectations of their colleagues".

The three components of the "ethos" of the occupation are enhanced by what Lortie called, the cellular structure of schools. The structure and culture of schools is a very important subtopic in this paper and it will be discussed separately in the next section.

3. The Structure and Culture of Schools

The structure and culture of schools have been some of the most powerful factors which have shaped teachers' identity. Social meanings about teaching, once built in conformity to the structure and culture of schools as well as affected by people's social class, gender and racial differences, also influence the way a person perceives reality at schools. Thus, individualism – as one of the strongest marks of teachers' identity – can be reinforced through both the organization and culture of schools as well as social meanings about teaching.

Tyack and Tobin (1994) use the term "grammar of schooling" meaning "the regular structures and rules that organize the work of instruction" to try to explain why it has been hard to promote successful educational reforms at school. According to them, despite many attempts to change the standard grammar of schooling, it has remained remarkably stable over the years.

> Educators have learned over generations how to work within these traditional organizational patterns. Habit is a labor-saving device. The familiar matrix of schooling persisted in part because it enabled teachers to discharge their duties in a predictable fashion and to cope with the

> everyday tasks that school boards, principals, and parents expected them to perform: controlling student behavior, instructing heterogeneous populations, or sorting people for future roles in school and later life. (p. 476).

Metz (1990), through an empirical study on the influence of social class differences on teachers' work, observed that "the schools were following a common script." In her point of view,

> What made the schools we were visiting such different places, and specifically such different contexts for teachers, was that the actors around them and inside them imbued their similar structure with different meanings. (p. 43).

Tyack and Tobin state that the "grammar of schooling" is itself a historical product. According to Lortie (1975), the "cellular" pattern of schools in the United States has also historical roots. The one-room schoolhouse with students of various ages led by one teacher was the initial schooling pattern in the U.S. In these self-sufficient "cells", which were also physically separated from the community, the teachers had considerable privacy in the conduct of their job. Urbanization was responsible for changes at school. For instance, schools composed of multiple self-contained classrooms gradually replaced the one-room schoolhouse.

> This type of organization meant that each teacher was assigned specific areas of responsibility and was expected to teach students the stipulated knowledge and skills without assistance from others. (Lortie, 1975, p. 15).

However, Lortie argues that these changes at schools did not radically alter teachers' work. As before, he said, the teacher continued to work largely alone with particular students. Thus, schools have been organized around teacher separation rather than interdependence.

Furthermore, Lortie claims the persistence of separation and low task interdependence among teachers is related to the circumstances affecting the growth of schools and the demographic characteristics of those attracted to teaching.

> It was easier for those governing schools to see them as aggregates of classroom units, as collections of independent cells, than as tightly integrated "organisms". They could cope with expansion of the student population by adding new classrooms and new teachers – it was not always necessary to create new schools to absorb increased numbers. They could deal with the steady loss of experienced teachers without severe organizational shock. (...) Such flexibility was possible as long as teachers worked independently; but had their tasks been closely interwoven, the comings and goings of staff members would have created administrative problems. (pp. 15-16).

The continuity of the cellular organization of schools has had critical consequences for teaching, and more specifically, for the perpetuation of its structural components. Yet, according to Lortie,

> The cellular form of school organization, and the attendant time and space ecology, puts interactions between teachers at the margin of their daily work. Individualism characterizes their socialization; teachers do not share a powerful technical culture. The major psychic rewards of teachers are earned in isolation from peers, and they can hamper one another by intruding on classroom boundaries. (p. 192).

Other researchers have also emphasized how school context has shaped teachers' practice. However, few people have explicitly related it to the construction of teachers' identity. For example, Talbert and McLaughlin (1993) agree that the culture of the school workplace is a critical feature of the context of teaching and learning. They conceive of teaching "as permeated by multiple layers of context, each of which has the capacity to significantly shape educational practice." (p. 188). In their words,

> (...) understanding context effects on teaching requires a view of the conditional nature of any context effect and of the multiple contexts that combine and interact to influence teaching practice. (...) [T]he salience of power of one or another context variable in affecting a teacher's instructional goals and practices depends on conditions in which it is embedded. (...) To understand teaching in context is to understand the interplay of the multiple, embedded contexts of education in the daily lives of teachers. (p. 190).

Thus, structures and rules at schools affect the construction of social meanings about teaching. Social meanings about teaching, in turn, are affected by people's social class, gender (Biklen 1995) and racial (Foster 1997) differences. These social meanings

are also responsible for perpetuating these structures and rules. Hence, how do the structure and culture of schools as well as social meanings about teaching participate in the construction of the teachers' identities? How do they reproduce this traditional image of teaching as an individualized work? These are some questions which need to be discussed more deeply in the educational literature.

4. The Teachers' Professional Preparation

Some researchers have stated that teachers are largely "self-made." However, even if teacher education has a relatively low impact on their professional lives, traditional teachers' professional preparation also reinforces a conception of teaching as an individualistic rather than a collegial enterprise.

According to Goodlad (1990), the emphasis of Western culture on individualism – in schooling as in other matters – already shapes the behavior of most student teachers. However, the teacher education enterprise is also well designed to perpetuate individual, competitive effort. In his opinion, the lack of a group focus in the teacher education programs comes as no surprise, "perhaps, given the solitary nature of teaching itself". He quotes from Zhixin Su's work in order to support his analysis.

> The organization of the training program, especially the structure of the student teaching experience, also tends to encourage the development of teacher individualism. Data from the surveys and interviews indicate that students in the programs studied did not have many collegial interactions, either on a formal basis or an informal basis, among themselves. The image of student teachers projected in the present study is an aggregate of persons learning to teach on their individual motivation and initiatives. The student teachers confront a 'sink-or-swim' situation in physical isolation. The way most beginners are inducted into teaching therefore leaves them doubly alone. (p. 211).

In the same direction, Goodlad talks about his own research through which the data showed that "[t]he individual rather than group orientation was further reinforced by the logistics of working and commuting. Formal courses emerged as almost the sole structure for shaping attitudes and beliefs about teaching." (p. 223).

Lortie (1975) agree with Goodlad's statement when he says:

> Courses in education are not "tough" enough to lead to collective strategies and deep sharing among students; the entry to work is person by person, each working largely in isolation from others. Whatever the effects of private ordeal may be, it is not likely that they build the common bonds which help construct a common occupational subculture. Its privateness reinforces the individualism. (p. 74).

Thus, Lortie states that the teachers' ordeal is private rather than shared. "The "sink-or-swim" pattern is individual, not collective; there is little to suggest that it induces a sense of solidarity with colleagues." (p. 160). Actually, teachers researched by Lortie seemed to balance individualism with some degree of mutual assistance. However, according to his own analysis,

> The image projected is more individualistic; teachers are portrayed as an aggregate of persons each assembling practices consistent with his experience and peculiar personality. It is not what "we, the colleagues" know and share which is paramount, but rather what I have learned through experience. From this perspective, socialization into teaching is largely *self-socialization*; one's personal predispositions are not only relevant but, in fact, stand at the core of becoming a teacher. (p. 79)

From Lortie's point of view, since the cellular organization of schools constrains the amount and type of interchange possible, beginning teachers spend most of their time physically separated from colleagues. He explains how this specific process of the professional initialization helps reproduce the *status quo* rather than change it.

> Unless beginning teachers undergo training experiences which offset their individualistic and traditional experiences, the occupation will be staffed by people who have little concern with building a shared technical culture. In the absence of such a culture, the diverse histories of teachers will play a cardinal role in their day-to-day activity. In that respect, the apprenticeship-of-observation is an ally of continuity rather than of change. (p. 67).

The professional career and the system of work rewards is another important factor that affects the construction of teachers' identity and reinforces individualism as one of its strongest mark. This discussion will be presented in the next section.

5. The Teachers' Professional Career

Some researchers claim that classroom teaching is eminently "unstaged." Lortie (1975) explains this by noting that "[c]ompared with most other kinds of middle-class work, teaching is relatively "career-less." (p. 84). The system of rewards, which emphasizes "psychic rewards" – "subjective valuations made in the course of work engagement", also fosters private rather than shared orientations. Although features of the rewards tend to be different for men and women, Lortie argues that teacher autonomy is enhanced because of limited external influences over individual teachers.

According to Lortie, the linkage between cellular isolation and opportunities to optimize psychic rewards can explain part of the teachers' resistance to alternative instructional arrangements. "The major impression is that each teacher is trying to strike the best personal balance he can get – to earn whatever psychic rewards he can." (p. 203).

Biklen (1995) discuss the dilemma of autonomy in classroom teaching. She states, "Autonomy brings freedom, but it also separates or distances individuals from caring, needy, or dependent relationships with others." (p. 94). In my personal opinion, this is a false dilemma. Indeed, it is grounded in a conception of autonomy as individual or personal. If we are able to think about this concept in a more collective way, this dilemma tends to disappear.

Ironically, current attempts to create a new professional culture among teachers, for example, through the work which has been done by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), have also been based upon individualistic approaches. Although this work is not the specific topic of this paper, however, it is an interesting and important issue that needs to be addressed by teachers, teacher educators, and educational researchers.

The teachers' identities are also constructed through their relationships with "others" – students, parents, other teachers and the principal. It is very interesting to realize how individualism is also reproduced in these relationships and, at the same time, how it reproduces them. According to Lortie, these relationships represent attempts at balancing the tensions between independence and dependence, autonomy and

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participation, control and subordination. These relationships are the theme of the following section.

6. The Teachers' Relationships with "Others"

Teachers' relationships with "others" are highly complex. Lortie states that teachers prefer to keep the classroom boundaries intact even though possibilities for cooperation outside the classroom are numerous. He uses the expression "distant assistant" to describe the role teachers want parents to take. Relationships among teachers are also marked by mutual indifference.

> The cellular form of school organization, and the attendant time and space ecology, puts interactions between teachers at the margin of their daily work. Individualism characterizes their socialization; teachers do not share a powerful technical culture. The major psychic rewards of teachers are earned in isolation from peers, and they can hamper one another by intruding on classroom boundaries. It seems that teachers can work effectively without the active assistance of colleagues, since teacher-teacher interaction does not seem to play a critical part in the work life of our respondents. (p. 192).

Lortie realized, through his empirical research, a tension between the quest for individual autonomy and the desire for collegial assistance. He wrote, "The norms respect the individual's right to choose between association and privacy; they also protect individual teachers against unsolicited interventions by others. Mutual assistance is permitted and, at one level, encouraged." (p. 195). Thus, the norms encourage both individualism *and* sharing of technical knowledge. Lortie adds that "[f]reedom to select one's level of association permits a teacher to maximize psychic rewards; depending upon personality differences, one can be a "loner" or work closely with others." (p. 195). In fact, according to him, the degree of cooperation at schools is a matter of individual choice.

Furthermore, Lortie also realized tensions between older and younger teachers. He states "age and marital cleavages within teaching reduce the collective power of the

teacher group" (p. 100). According to him, these tensions may also complicate the possibility for more effective collegial relationships among teachers.

Biklen (1995) criticizes the popular construction of the "teacher-as-hero". According to her, "people are heroic in isolation from others." The traditional hero is entrepreneurial and individualistic. In her research, she found through her research "many of the teachers who defined their work most centrally around the students as loners."

> They were loners because they appeared as adults isolated from other adults but surrounded by children. Two teachers (...) described themselves as "loners", and each complained of lacking "community" and a "sharing" atmosphere. Both wanted more communication among teachers at the school, and the lack of it disappointed them both. (p. 182).

Yet, Mitchell (1997) talks about some aspects of a teacher's professional identity that when not shared pose barriers to collaboration. She states "[F]aculty cohesion cannot exist when teachers do not share common norms and values about teaching, learning, and the roles that teachers play in those processes." According to her, "[t]he willingness to work together (...) is often predicated on mutual degrees of respect and trust that exist as a result of a shared sense of professional identity."

Before going to the final section of this paper, where I present a preliminary discussion on the challenges facing us in eroding the strength of individualism in defining traditional teachers' identity, I intend to draw from Britzman's work to briefly discuss some cultural myths in teacher identity construction.

7. Myths in Teacher Identity Construction

Britzman (1991) criticizes "traditional theories of socialization" – the Lortie's definition of socialization, for instance – because they "cannot account for the ways individuals refashion, resist, or even take up dominant meanings as if they were their authors". The functionalist analysis that student teachers internalize the subculture of their group point to a static and monolithic understanding of culture. Against this idea, Britzman prefers to think about the process of becoming a teacher within a "multiplicity

of realities – both given and possible – that form competing ideologies, discourses, and the discursive practices that are made available because of them." (p. 57). Thus, for her, "culture is where identities, desires, and investments are mobilized, constructed, and reworked" (p. 57). At the same time, "culture is always in the process of being reinvented, renegotiated, and reinterpreted by its participants" (p. 58).

According to Britzman, a teachers' identity is 'overpopulated' with cultural myths. In her words,

> (...) superficial images of the work of teachers become the material for cultural myths about teaching and may bear upon the expectations, desires, and investments one brings to and constructs during the process of becoming a teacher (1991, p. 6).

Teachers' classroom appearance and school structure are the basis for these cultural myths. These cultural myths partly structure the individual's taken-for-granted views of power, authority, knowledge, and identity, and the persistency of cultural myths positions "the teacher as expert, as self-made, as sole bearer of power, and as a product of experience." In Britzman's opinion, "cultural myths are persuasive because they reorganize contradictory elements of authoritative and internally persuasive discourse" (p. 222). They "beckon and repel, promote and dispute, particular meanings about the work and the identity of the teacher" (p. 223).

Britzman addresses three cultural myths that influence the process of learning to teach: "everything depends upon the teacher," "the teacher is the expert," and "teachers are self-made." According to her,

> Each myth authorizes a discourse on power, knowledge, and the self that works to promote the impossible desire of assuming the self to be capable of embodying a noncontradictory subjectivity and capable of asserting a form of control that depends upon the individual's unambivalent acceptance of authoritative discourse (p. 223).

On the first myth – 'everything depends on the teacher' –, Britzman writes: "Everything – student learning, the presentation of curriculum, and social control – is held to be within the teacher's domain, while the teacher's isolated classroom existence is

accepted as the norm" (p. 223). This kind of myth helps student teachers to construct an "essentialist view of the teacher." Consequently, through "a mimetic theory of learning and of knowledge, students absorb the singular meanings of a work" (p. 225). Yet, "the myth that everything depends upon the teacher provokes this return to the self" (p. 226).

In the second cultural myth – 'the teacher as expert' – "the 'methods-as-an-end' discourse (...) attempts to objectify, as a technical problem, these subjective fears and thereby to render the unknown familiar by positioning pedagogy as the acquisition of 'tricks of the trade' and suppressing the political commitments that structure every methodology" (p. 227). In Britzman's point of view, "The combined effects of compulsory school – and university – education have naturalized the construct of the teacher as expert" (p. 229). Thus, "the construction of the teacher as expert also tends to produce the image of the teacher as an autonomous and unitary individual and as the source of knowledge. From this standpoint, teachers seem to have learned everything and consequently have nothing to learn" (p. 229).

Finally, the third myth – 'teachers are self-made' – supports the views that teachers form themselves and are 'born' into the profession". It "provides a commonsense explanation (...) that produces the construct of 'the natural teacher' – [someone who] possesses talent, intuition, and common sense, all essential features that combine to construct a knower as subjectivist (p. 230). She explains that "In the supposedly self-made world of the teacher, pedagogy is positioned as a product of one's personality and therefore is replaced by teaching style" (p. 232). Britzman also stresses the consequences of this myth in teacher education and the teachers' work. In her words, "many in the field of teacher education promote the view that teaching style cannot be taught, but is considered a self-constructed product, mediated only by personal choice" (p. 232). Furthermore, "the myth that teachers are self-made serves to cloak the social relationships and the context of school structure by exaggerating personal autonomy" (p. 232).

In her opinion, "More than any other myth, the dominant belief that teachers 'make' themselves functions to devalue any meaningful attempt to make relevant teacher education, educational theory, and the social process of acknowledging the values and interests one brings to and constructs because of the educational encounter." (p. 230).

Thus, "the myth that teachers are self-made structures a suspicion of theory, and encourages the stance of anti-intellectualism" (p. 231). Consequently, it is common to realize in teachers' and student teachers' behavior "the rejection of any concept of theory and the valorization of an essentialized self as the sole source of knowledge" (p. 231).

Britzman persists in directing our attention to the fact that

> cultural myths promote a view of the teacher as rugged individual, an identity that bestows valor on the lonely process of becoming a teacher, but at the same time suppresses the social meanings and forces that beckon the subject as a rugged individual. While individual effort is, of course, a necessary condition in learning to teach, so too are social negotiation, interaction, and social dependence (p. 236).

Yet, she points out "the cultural myths of the self-made, autonomous, expert teacher supports the ideology of blaming the victim and ultimately promotes a simplistic understanding of the operation of power in education life" (p. 237).

Hence, one way to transcend traditional boundaries of teachers' identity is through breaking with these teaching profession cultural myths. The idea of implementing collaborative teacher research at the schools and in teacher education programs is another means for surpassing these boundaries. This collaborative teacher research is the topic of the final section of this article.

8. Collaborative Teacher Research as a Possibility for Transcending Traditional Boundaries of Teachers' Identity

An article published in the Stanford Magazine[3] tells us a story about a middle school science teacher in Palo Alto who has decided to quit teaching in order to become a firefighter. One of the reasons that this ex-schoolteacher claims led to his decision was "the sense of isolation" that he had felt during those six years teaching middle school students. He admitted, "It's a very lonely job." According to him, his new career as a firefighter "combines many of the things he loved about teaching – the possibility of

[3] Why teach? *Stanford Magazine*. September/October 2001. By Christine Foster.

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helping people, of doing something meaningful – with other things he thought were missing in education, including a sense of working as part of a team" (p. 53). "You don't get the camaraderie in teaching that you get in the fire service," he said.

Current discussions about teaching have highlighted the complexity of the teachers' work, involving theoretical and practical knowledge, marked by the uncertainty and briefness of its actions. As stated by Little (1990), "complex work cannot be accomplished by even the most knowledgeable individuals acting alone." As an attempt to overcome the isolation of teachers at schools many scholars defend the idea of collaborative teacher research. However, in order to make viable this idea, structural and cultural changes at schools – as well as in their "multiple layers of context" – and in teacher education programs will be needed. Obviously, this is not a simple task. Actually, as is commonly known, for complex problems there are no simplistic solutions.

Lortie (1975) is one of the scholars who supports the need for inquiry-oriented teachers. According to him, "preparing critical, intellectually curious teachers is part of the process of producing practitioners who will be capable of contributing knowledge to the field." (p. 242). He also believes that a school-university collaboration approach could be adopted in order to prepare people for the role of teacher-researcher as well as to develop research on classroom problems. He conceives teacher-researchers as a liaison between classroom teachers and outside researchers. Other authors, even those who consider strong school-university partnerships as something important for the development of research in classrooms, prefer to emphasize teachers working at schools as genuine researchers in schools.

Cohn and Kottkamp (1993), for instance, propose in their book a contemporary version of school as a center of inquiry, "a community where teachers can both teach and learn how to create improved learning environments for today's students" (p. 265-266). According to them, "(...) teachers in an inquiry-oriented school [engage] as members of a collaborative group in the design and implementation of new approaches to learning, including the structural changes necessary to support alternative models." (p. 279). The authors are aware of the complexity of this task. They aim to change the system at the school level.

> In replacing old hierarchical relationships and individual isolation with collaborative action, the concept of autonomy will inevitably change. (...) [T]eacher autonomy is presently a fragile and individually held form of authority which teachers desire because of their isolation and need to adjust to the ambiguous and unpredictable nature of their work. However, with collaborative work, isolation is reduced and authority can make at least a partial shift toward the group of scholar-teachers. Teachers will increasingly need collective autonomy, a new autonomy based on their new role as collaborative inquirers. (p. 285).

Thus, structural and cultural changes at school will inevitably promote changes in other educational spheres. They can modify conceptions as well. In my opinion, these changes can also affect how teachers' identities are constructed. Similar to Mitchell (1997), teachers' identities are understood here as a result of complex interactions between larger social contexts, school contexts, and personal biographies.

According to Danielewicz (2001), "[b]ecause collaborative learning alters the nature of social interaction, identities (which are constructed in social interaction) are affected as well." (p. 149). From Mitchell's point of view, underlying assumptions and implicit understandings participate in these complex social interactions. Teachers' expectations of colleagues revolve around subjective realities of what it means to be a teacher.

Little (1990) claims "the available research suggests that inquiry into teachers' professional relationships can be advanced by distinguishing "weak" from "strong" ties among colleagues." (p. 511). She further comments:

> The move from conditions of complete independence to thoroughgoing interdependence entails changes in frequency and intensity of teachers' interactions, the prospects of conflict, and probability of mutual influence. That is, with each successive shift, the warrant for autonomy shifts from individual to collective judgment and preference. (p. 512).

She uses the term "joint work" as a conception of collegiality "that [rests] on shared responsibility for the work of teaching (interdependence), collective conceptions of autonomy, support for teachers' initiative and leadership with regard to professional practice, and group affiliations grounded in professional work." (p. 519). In addition she writes:

> Collegiality as collaboration or as joint work anticipates truly collective action – teachers' decisions to pursue a single course of action in concert or, alternatively, to decide on a set of basic priorities that in turn guide the independent choices of individual teachers. (p. 519).

Finally, as indicated by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993), there are no obvious and simple ways to create the conditions that support teacher research in preservice and inservice teacher education programs. In their opinion, in order to try to solve and overcome this problem, "teachers will need to establish networks and create forums so that ongoing collaboration is possible." (p. 22). They also note that

> [o]vercoming these obstacles requires the building and sustaining of intellectual communities of teacher researchers or networks of individuals who enter with other teachers into "a common search" for meaning in their work lives (Westerhoff, 1987) and who regard their research as part of larger efforts to transform teaching, learning, and schooling. (pp. 85-86).

Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (1994) agree with the previous point of view and state that educators' forums – research seminars for teachers – have "as [their] goal the support of teachers as they carry out their research." (p. 77).

According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993), these forums are, in fact, already in place, and networks of teacher researchers have also been multiplied in the United States since the early 1980s:

> Increasingly, communities of teacher researchers from different parts of the country are disseminating their work to one another and developing a classroom-grounded knowledge base from the collective inquires of teachers across contexts. Growing networks of teacher researchers have thus begun to provide access to their teaching colleagues through conferences and publications. (p. 57).

It is possible to imagine communities of teacher researchers and networks of individuals sharing their experiences, and trying to create collective as well as collaborative and critical teacher research approaches in schools. This is only one of the first steps towards a construction of a new teacher identity.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, I briefly discuss the social construction of teachers' professional identity. I focus this discussion on one of the strongest marks of traditional teachers' identity: individualism. The "ethos" of the occupation, the structure and culture of schools, the teachers' professional preparation, their professional career, as well as the relationships between teachers and other people in schools are subtopics that help us understand the construction of this strong element of the traditional teachers' identity.

Finally, I argue we should look at school not only as a teaching-and-learning institution but also as a place where people develop collaborative research. I argue that collaborative teacher research – to be developed in schools as well as teacher education programs – is one possibility for transcending or transforming traditional teacher identity formation.

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